

Neighborhood Crime Watch



Community Services
Crime Prevention Unit
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8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Neighborhood Crime Watch

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This program is provided by the Harris County Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit.

What is Neighborhood Crime Watch?

Very few people are in a position to protect their homes and property 100% of the time. Vacation, business, and shopping trips, or even an evening out will leave homes unattended and vulnerable to burglary.

Neighborhood Crime Watch is a program of mutual assistance among neighbors aimed at reducing crime in the community at the grass roots level. It involves getting to know one's neighbors and introducing them to the concept of Neighborhood Crime Watch – a concept involving good neighbors working together, alert to the potential of crime, and willing to look out for one another's interests. ***Neighbors working together through Neighborhood Crime Watch can combat crime in their area the most effective way – BEFORE IT STARTS!***

One important criterion to ensure a well maintained Neighborhood Crime Watch is to have a minimum of 60% residential participation. Citizens offer an open invitation to criminals every day when they leave their doors unlocked, advertise their absence from home with an unlit house, piled up newspapers, or leave car keys in the ignition.

When formulating a crime control strategy, one must consider which course is more effective and less costly: hundreds of law enforcement personnel in every neighborhood and a guard at every door – **OR – ADEQUATE LIGHTING, SECURE HOMES AND WATCHFUL NEIGHBORS.** It would appear that crime prevention is the most logical and most economical approach to take in crime control.

Neighborhood Crime Watch provides a means of reducing the opportunity for crime to occur—through the active participation of citizens in crime prevention. Citizens are taught how to make their homes less of an attractive target for thieves, how to participate in Operations Identification, and how to be alert to suspicious activity in the neighborhood.

Primary Objectives of Neighborhood Crime Watch:

1. Maintain a minimum level of 60% residential participation (a cooperative system of surveillance over one another's property, etc.)
2. Report suspicious activity of persons or crimes in progress to the Sheriff's Office accurately and immediately.
3. Mutually assist and encourage the accomplishment of home security inspections, target hardening and property marking activities by all neighborhood residents.
4. Assist the victims of crime and assist in their readjustment to normalcy.
5. Encourage citizens to come forward as witnesses.
6. Help elderly citizens and children to protect themselves against being a victim of a crime and push for additional projects to protect these special groups of persons whenever necessary.

Neighborhood Crime Watch And the Theory of Reduction of Opportunity

Most residential crimes occur because the opportunity to commit them existed!

Opportunity may be divided into two categories:

1. The opportunity created by the victim through carelessness, lack of attention of security and failure to cooperate with neighbors.
2. The opportunity created by the criminal, by his skill, ruthlessness, and daring.

The latter category describes the professional criminal. It is believed by law enforcement that a small minority of crime is a result of the work of a professional criminal. The bulk of crime involves skilled or unskilled amateurs and centers on opportunities created by the victims themselves.

Duties of the Neighborhood Crime Watch Chairperson

The appointment of the proper Chairperson can determine the success of the program. This person should have prestige within the community, an ability to communicate, and some free time. The Chairperson should preside over all meetings as well as:

1. Set up the initial meeting to explain the concept of Neighborhood Crime Watch
2. Obtain Block Captains in the neighborhood and set up a file with their names, addresses, and phone numbers.
3. Serve as liaison between the Neighborhood Crime Watch group and the Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit Deputy.
4. Assist in the development of any program that would be beneficial to the community.
5. Keep a master list of all participants in the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program.
6. Distribute information and necessary materials to Block Captains.
7. Schedule the location for monthly meetings as well as obtaining speakers for the program.
8. Welcome new neighbors to the community and encourage their participation in the Neighborhood Crime Watch.
9. Keep a master list of the emergency telephone notification system.

Duties of the Neighborhood Crime Watch Block Captains

1. Compile a list of all those on his/her block who wish to participate, as well as their addresses and telephone numbers.
2. Relay telephone calls from the Chairperson to back-up Captains in the block. If one of the persons is not at home try at another time.
3. Distribute literature to Crime Watchers when necessary.
4. Assist the Chairperson with meetings.
5. Maintain a list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other Block Captains in the neighborhood.
6. Report to the Chairperson any arrest resulting from information received from Block Watchers and any suspicious vehicles or persons.

How the Telephone Chain Works General Instructions

1. Determine from block watchers and neighbors the best time to call to relay the chain. Ask whether they wish to be called during the night in emergency situations. Example: burglar running the general direction of neighbor's homes or adjoining blocks.
2. When one is going to be away, notify the Block Captain and immediate neighbors.
3. Report anything suspicious to the local law enforcement agency. They would prefer to spend 10 minutes checking out a call than 10 days following up on a crime that has already been committed.
4. When the call originates from the law enforcement agency investigating the crime rather than neighbors give information to the officer only and do not call the victim.
5. Call the victim (discretion is advised) if more information is needed to substantiate observations of suspicious activity. Report these observations to the law enforcement agency only.
6. **NEVER CONFRONT A SUSPECT!**
7. *YOU ARE NOT THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE OR CONSTABLE'S OFFICE. YOU WORK WITH THESE DEPARTMENTS.*
8. As a Crime Watcher one is considered to be the eyes and ears of the Sheriff's Office or Constable's Office. The importance as a Crime Watcher cannot be overemphasized.

Your Part in the Chain

- * Keep a pen and special phone pad near the phone at all times to write important information down that has been received.
- * Be brief and precise in all calls.
- * This is not a social call; discuss only the issue at hand.
- * Relay information exactly as it is given. Do not delete from or add information given to you.
- * Repeat the information to the person calling for accuracy.
- * Information given to the subdivision by the Crime Prevention Deputy or Investigate Deputy is to be shared only with Crime Watchers. The criminal need not hear of his escapades from neighborhood gossip whereby his/her actions might be altered for the worse.
- * Make the call(s) as soon as possible!
- * If you have been victimized or have seen a suspect or vehicle reported in the Chain contact law enforcement immediately.

Procedure for Reporting to the Sheriff's Office

It is extremely important that one becomes thoroughly familiar with all instructions on this page so when the time occurs, one can function as a Crime Watcher properly by reporting suspicious activities, a crime in progress, or an emergency – BE PREPARED!

1. Identify yourself – name, address, phone number.
2. Type of crime – burglary, assault, suspicious person(s), vehicle(s), etc...
3. Is the crime in progress?
4. Where is it – name of building or landmark if no address can be given.
5. Is the suspect(s) armed? -- With what (gun, knife, etc.)
6. Description of suspect(s) and/or vehicle(s). Be specific.
7. Direction which the suspect(s) were traveling.
8. What was taken (if known)?
9. How was entry made – door, window, etc.

**Harris County Sheriff's Office Non-Emergency Line
(713) 221-6000**

For True Emergencies Call 911

Harris County Sheriff's Office Neighborhood Crime Watch

General Information for Individual Participants

- I. For suspicious incidents call **(713) 221-6000**. For crimes in-progress call **911**.
 - A. First call is to the **Sheriff's Office Non-Emergency Line (713) 221-6000**. The Block Captain should be notified as soon as possible in case the suspect is still in the area. The Block Captain sets a visual perimeter "fence" around the area by calling others in the Chain. This could aid the Sheriff's Office in tracking the suspect if he/she attempts to flee the area.
 - B. Block Captains should notify the Chairperson as soon as possible after setting up the visual perimeter. This would be helpful should the area of search need to be broadened. The Neighborhood Chairperson then alerts other Block Captains in the immediate vicinity, should it become necessary.
- II. Suspicious vehicle/suspicious persons calls:
 - A. These situations should be handled with care and common sense. Many times the "suspicious" label is applied because the vehicle or person is out of his/her apparent environment, i.e. – a beaten up van in an upper class residential area.
 - B. Keep in mind that there are no laws or ordinances specifying where or when any vehicle or person may travel on a public roadway.
 - C. If a vehicle parked in the area for an extensive period of time is observed cruising repeatedly, or if a person is loitering in the area, obtain a license number, description, note what appeared to be suspicious and call the **Sheriff's Office (713) 221-6000**. A large percentage of calls do assist in the apprehension of criminals.
 - D. Block Captains should be informed of sightings of these vehicles or persons to be passed on to Chairperson.

If possible, obtain the license number of a suspicious vehicle, without jeopardizing your safety – LOG the *DATE, TIME, LOCATION, NUMBER* and *VEHICLE DESCRIPTION* and provide it to the Sheriff's Office when they arrive.

The KEY is communication and information.

*You are NOT expected to solve the crimes, nor are you to interfere with the investigation.
YOU ARE IN A POSITION TO gather and provide information to the Sheriff's Office through
The Neighborhood Crime Watch telephone chain.*

How to Make the Neighborhood Crime Watch Work

- I. **Talk it up.** Keep people thinking about Neighborhood Crime Watch. Remind your neighbors of the importance of observance of suspicious and criminal activity and reporting it to the Sheriff's Office. Getting people to remember to get off of the couch and check the area is probably the hardest part of the Neighborhood Crime Watch.
- II. **Try to "socialize" your neighborhood.** The most effective Neighborhood Crime Watch groups have been in areas which have an active Civic Association which hold monthly meetings and sponsors social gatherings, picnics, National Night Out and other events. Getting your neighbors to know each other and develop friendships is a key to getting people concerned about each other's welfare and threats to their security.
- III. **Try to "clean up" your neighborhood.** An unkempt area, unsightly lawns, junk stored by houses, unpainted houses, decaying fences, and trash strewn around are a statement that people do not care and are an open invitation to criminals. Studies have shown that the appearance of an area is influential in discouraging intruders. Another point found effective in turning away criminals is delineating property boundaries with shrubbery and fencing – not necessarily chain link fencing or privacy fences even a low white picket fence says, "this is my property – keep out." The same effect has been achieved in apartment complexes by using different colored carpeting and doorways for each apartment entrance. Sometimes psychological barriers can be as strong as physical ones.
- IV. **Brighten your neighborhood.** While many burglaries occur in the morning and early afternoon a number occur at night and almost all vandalism occurs at night. The best and cheapest deterrent to nighttime criminal activity is lighting. Football field lighting is not necessary, just enough light to enable a resident to recognize a prowler or to make a prowler think he/she can be recognized. Many options are available including formation of a street lighting district to shared installation of dawn to dusk lights in back yards. Some power companies will install this type of lighting on existing utility poles. Again this measure is more psychological than physical, but it works!
- V. **Social Media:** Facebook and Nextdoor.

Maintaining the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program

It may be difficult to keep up the initial enthusiasm of the Neighborhood Crime Watch group. As crime is lessened in your area residents may become less interested in attending meetings while still remaining concerned about crime.

Your Crime Prevention Deputy will be able to continue assistance as needed.

Strong leadership (and neighborhood participation) is essential to maintain the active involvement of the community in the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program. The Chairperson and Block Captains, vitally interested in the security of the neighborhood, are decidedly an asset in motivating the group to realize their objectives. The Block Captains may become involved in training other Block Captains as well as replacement should he/she move from the community.

As crime is lessened within the community, citizens may broaden their scope to maintain the functioning as a group. Residents may concern themselves with the total quality of living in their neighborhood. Community pride may be a strong motivation in maintaining the program.

The continued value of citizens' involvement protecting their neighborhood is the primary concern of an effective and successful Neighborhood Crime Watch Program!

Operation Identification Record

Valuable property should be marked with an electric engraver or any sharp etching tool with your Texas Driver's License Number (TX DL _____). If you are not a driver, you can obtain a Texas ID card and number from the Department of Public Safety Driver's License Office. Avoid marking on removable parts such as lids, doors, plates, etc.

Items which cannot be marked, i.e. antiques, china, coins, etc. should be photographed in color with the owner's identification. A complete description of the article should be written on the back of the photograph.

Suggested Items for Marking: bicycles, T.V.'s, stereos, tape recorders, cameras, appliances, sporting goods, guns, computers, sewing machines, clocks, watches, power tools, lawn mowers, outboard motors, golf carts, golf clubs, DVD players, etc. Credit card numbers should also be recorded and stored for safe keeping in the event the card is lost or stolen.

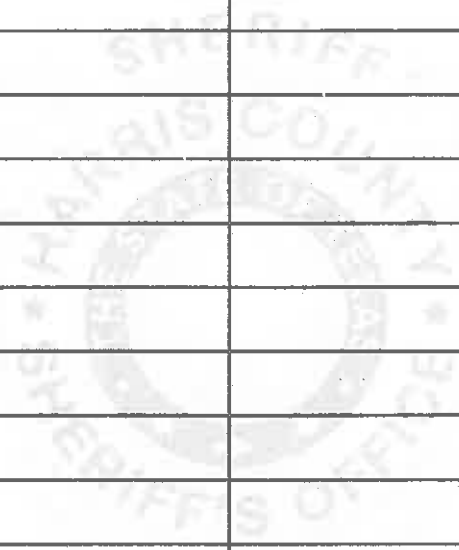
PROPERTY TO BE MARKED

Article	Manufacturer/Model	Serial Number	Location Marked

Keep this list in a secure place. DO NOT SEND A COPY TO THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE.

TELEPHONE LIST

Neighborhood Chair Person			
Home Phone Number		Work Phone Number	
Street Name	Block Captain	Block Watchers	Phone Numbers



EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NOTIFICATION

Street Name			
Section			
1	2	3	

Participant	House Number	Day Phone Number	Night Phone Number



LOG

Caller	Address	Time/Date	Phone Number	Description of Incident

